

Teacher's notes

This resource takes the traditional 'layers of inference' source analysis idea and focuses on connecting students' inferences about the impact of the Black Death with their prior learning and understanding about responses to disease and beliefs about medicine.

To complete the activity you will need to print copies of the sources on pp.6-14 of this document. Enlarging the pages to A3 might be necessary to allow students more room for annotation, particularly if you decide to have students working in groups.

Students could work in pairs or small groups on each source to begin with, and the teacher should 'drip feed' the prompt information and questions, given below, at timely intervals. Each group could work on one source and then present their ideas to the class with the source projected onscreen. Alternatively students could work on all of them, in turn, as a carousel activity.

Source A

Information on content and provenance	Possible prompt questions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is a 19th century German engraving. • It depicts a group of flagellants in the mid-14th century. • Flagellants were an extremely religious group who believed that catastrophic events such as the plague were God's judgement on the sins of His people. They hoped that whipping themselves would gain forgiveness from God so they would avoid a worse punishment – the plague. • Flagellants travelled from town to town in groups. There were many such groups on the continent, as shown in this picture, but there is evidence of several in Britain and one which paraded outside St Paul's Cathedral in London. • Linking to the bigger picture, this source suggests that the Black Death was a shocking event which caused many people to adopt extreme religious practices. • It also suggests little progress had been made in understanding the spread of disease, as these groups turned to religion rather than science to try to avoid the plague. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Which figures in the picture are the flagellants? • Why might whipping oneself become popular at a time of disease? • Does this support or challenge the assumption that there was progress in the Middle Ages in the understanding of disease? • Why do you think the practice of flagellation became widespread (but not necessarily common!)? • Why do you think a picture of this practice was created in the 19th century? Does that make it significant in any way?

Source B

Information on content and provenance	Possible prompt questions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This image is from <i>Children's Book Illustrations & Ephemera</i>, a children's book series, from 1964. • It shows townsfolk driving out a man and his sick wife, along with a man and his sick child, both suffering from the plague. • It depicts a practice common during the Black Death: expelling the sick and their families in an effort to prevent the disease spreading within the town or village. • This was one of the few practices which helped to stop the spread of the plague. • The depiction of peasants carrying out the expulsion with the threat of violence suggests this was not an official policy, and was carried out at a grass-roots level rather than by the authorities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Which figures in the picture are sick? • Why are some apparently healthy people being driven away? • Would this practice help to prevent the plague from spreading? • Who looks in charge of removing the sick from the towns and villages? • What does this suggest about the response of the authorities to the epidemic? • Can we infer anything from this about the level of progress made in understanding disease?

Source C

Information on content and provenance	Possible prompt questions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This is a contemporary picture depicting plague burials in the Netherlands. • Although the image shows burials in a Dutch city, contemporary accounts and archaeological excavations in Britain show a similar situation in terms of the number of burials in a short space of time, and that ordinary people were needed to undertake the burials. • The picture suggests both grief and a sense of chaos as so many burials were required in a small area. • The number of burials also suggests a very high death rate, and one unprecedented by contemporaries. • It suggests traditions surrounding burials had broken down as ordinary people were required to do it. Usually they would be done individually and by the clergy. • On the contrary, it also suggests some traditions held firm, such as the continued use of coffins. Other sources contradict this, describing speedy burials into hastily-dug plague pits. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the people carrying? • What does this suggest about changes and continuities in the practice of burying the dead? • What signs are there that there has been a pandemic? • What can we infer about the emotional impact of the Black Death? • Can we infer anything from this about the level of progress made in understanding disease since the Roman era?

Source D

Information on content and provenance	Possible prompt questions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This image is from a 20th century children’s book series. • It depicts plague burials in the city of Norwich. • The number of burials also suggests a very high death rate, and one unprecedented by contemporaries. • It suggests some traditions have had to be abandoned, especially the use of coffins. • It suggests the burials have been done speedily rather than according to religious tradition, suggesting shock and fear. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the people carrying? • What does this suggest about changes and continuities in the practice of burying the dead? • What signs are there that there has been a pandemic? • What can we infer about the emotional impact of the Black Death? • What can we infer about ideas about public health? • Can we infer anything from this about the level of progress made in understanding disease since the Roman era?

Source E

Information on content and provenance	Possible prompt questions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This is a 19th century picture which shows people praying for relief from the Black Death, circa 1350. • Other features of the plague experience are shown, including a collection cart of plague victims on the right. • Many figures in the foreground appear to be dead but there are still people gathered around them. This contradicts the idea of belief in miasmas - perhaps due to Victorian poetic licence! • It suggests that the clergy provided spiritual guidance and comfort during the Black Death, which is again contradicted in many sources. The death rate amongst clergy was particularly high due to their tendency to work closely with the sick. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How many different features of the response to the Black Death can you find in this image? • Do you think it is a realistic and/or reliable record? • What is suggested about the role of the clergy in people’s responses to the Black Death? • Could this image be used to argue that the response of doctors to the plague was ineffective?

Source F

Information on content and provenance	Possible prompt questions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This is an inscription on a wall of Ashwell Church, Hertfordshire. • The large letters tell us about when the plague came to the village in 1350, and left the village in 1361, when there were severe gales. • It is credible evidence that the plague did not only strike in 1348-9, and also that it took many years to die out in some areas. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why would someone write graffiti on the wall of a church during such a strongly religious period? • What does this suggest about the emotional impact of the Black Death? • How useful is this source for understanding the impact of the plague? • Why do you think the Black Death stayed in this area for so long?

Source G

Information on content and provenance	Possible prompt questions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This is an order from King Edward III from the Calendar of Close Rolls, 1349. • It is one of the few surviving pieces of evidence we have about public health concerns as a result of the plague. • The state of London's streets was a particular worry even before the plague struck. • Contemporaries noticed a correlation between unhygienic living conditions (there are many mentions of 'filth' and 'bad smells') but the real link was not properly understood. • That the order came from the King suggests a very serious concern from the authorities about both public health and the virulence of the plague. • It also suggests that the condition of large towns had actually deteriorated since Roman times, which students should be able to link to prior learning about sanitation in Roman towns and cities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who might have given this order? • What specific complaints about public health are listed? • Does this source suggest the authorities understood how disease spread? • What can we infer about the progress of public health conditions since the Romans?

Source H

Information on content and provenance	Possible prompt questions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> William Deane wrote this passage describing the Black Death in Rochester c. 1348. It gives further evidence of the hasty, improvised nature of burials as a result of the plague's high death toll. It also suggests what traditions regarding burials were followed before the plague struck. It suggests much about the emotional impact of the Black Death. The abandonment of religious and social practices caused much shock and sorrow. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is this contemporary source more useful to us than an archaeologist's report about plague pit excavations? Why do you think William Deane sounds so upset about how burials were carried out? What can we infer about burials before the plague struck?

Source I

Information on content and provenance	Possible prompt questions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This image is from the late 14th century. It shows the clothes of Black Death victims being burnt in medieval Europe, circa 1348. Like Source G, this image suggests an attempt to stop the plague spreading which may have been effective, although the reasons why would not have been properly understood. It suggests a belief in the miasma theory, that diseases spread via bad smells in the air, which the clothing may have contributed to if left unburnt. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What are these people hoping to achieve? How effective do you think this method was in preventing the spread of the plague? What can you infer about the progress in understanding the spread of disease by the middle of the Middle Ages?

Discussion on the understanding of the causes of disease versus noticing a correlation

Sources G and I are useful for prompting a discussion about the misleading nature of some contemporary evidence. We can recognise the practices shown in them as being potentially useful to stopping the spread of disease, but this was not actually understood by contemporaries. They noticed a correlation between, for example, squalor and illness, but were unaware of the science behind this. Instead they believed in miasmas as a cause of disease which actually hindered the understanding of the spread of illness for several centuries.

What questions do you want to ask about the source?

How does this link to your understanding of medicine before and during the Middle Ages?

What can you see in, or infer from, the source? **Hint:** Focus your thinking on ideas about the spread of disease, understanding of cures, and the impact of disease.



Source A: A 19th century German engraving showing a group of flagellants in the mid-14th century.

What questions do you want to ask about the source?

How does this link to your understanding of medicine before and during the Middle Ages?

What can you see in, or infer from, the source? **Hint:** Focus your thinking on ideas about the spread of disease, understanding of cures, and the impact of disease.



Source B: 'The Terrible Plague': Townsfolk driving out a man and his sick wife along with a man and his sick child, both suffering from the plague. From a 20th century children's book.

Image credit: The Wonderful Story of Britain: The Terrible Plague CREDIT: Peter Jackson / Bridgeman Art Library / Universal Images Group, Copyright notice: © Bridgeman Art Library / For Education Use Only. This and millions of other educational images are available through Britannica Image Quest. For a free trial, please visit www.britannica.co.uk/trial

What questions do you want to ask about the source?

How does this link to your understanding of medicine before and during the Middle Ages?

What can you see in, or infer from, the source? **Hint:** Focus your thinking on ideas about the spread of disease, understanding of cures, and the impact of disease.



Source C: Victims of the Black Death being buried at Tournai, then part of the Netherlands, 1349. The Black Death was thought to have been an outbreak of the bubonic plague, which killed up to half the population of Europe.

What questions do you want to ask about the source?

How does this link to your understanding of medicine before and during the Middle Ages?

What can you see in, or infer from, the source? **Hint:** Focus your thinking on ideas about the spread of disease, understanding of cures, and the impact of disease.



Source D: An image from a 20th century children's book showing plague burials in the city of Norwich in 1349.

What questions do you want to ask about the source?

How does this link to your understanding of medicine before and during the Middle Ages?

What can you see in, or infer from, the source? **Hint:** Focus your thinking on ideas about the spread of disease, understanding of cures, and the impact of disease.

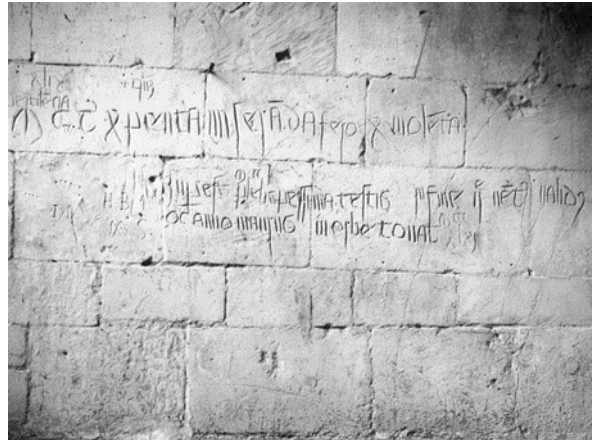


Source E: This is a 19th century picture which shows people praying for relief from the Black Death, circa 1350

What questions do you want to ask about the source?

How does this link to your understanding of medicine before and during the Middle Ages?

What can you see in, or infer from, the source? **Hint:** Focus your thinking on ideas about the spread of disease, understanding of cures, and the impact of disease.



Source F: This engraving is on a wall of Ashwell Church in Hertfordshire. It reads: 'There was a plague 1000, three times 100, five times 10, a pitiable, fierce violent (plague departed); a wretched populace survives to witness and in the end a mighty wind, Maurus, thunders in this year in the world, 1361'.

Image credit: Writing On Wall CREDIT: Rischgitz / Hulton Archive / Getty Images / Universal Images Group, Copyright notice: © Getty Images / For Education Use Only. This and millions of other educational images are available through Britannica Image Quest. For a free trial, please visit www.britannica.co.uk/trial

What questions do you want to ask about the source?

How does this link to your understanding of medicine before and during the Middle Ages?

What can you see in, or infer from, the source? **Hint:** Focus your thinking on ideas about the spread of disease, understanding of cures, and the impact of disease.

Order to cause the human faeces and other filth lying in the streets ... to be removed with all speed ... and to cause the city to be cleaned ... so that no greater cause of mortality may arise from such smells. The King has learned how the city ... is so foul with the filth from out of the houses by day and night that the air is infected and the city poisoned to the danger of men ... especially by the contagious sickness which increases daily.

Source G: This is an order from King Edward III from the Calendar of Close Rolls, 1349.

What questions do you want to ask about the source?

How does this link to your understanding of medicine before and during the Middle Ages?

What can you see in, or infer from, the source? **Hint:** Focus your thinking on ideas about the spread of disease, understanding of cures, and the impact of disease.

To our great grief the plague carried off so vast a multitude of people of both sexes that nobody could be found who could bear the corpses to the grave. Men and women carried their own children on their shoulders to the church and threw them into a common pit.

Source H: William Deane wrote this passage describing the Black Death in Rochester c. 1348.

What questions do you want to ask about the source?

How does this link to your understanding of medicine before and during the Middle Ages?

What can you see in, or infer from, the source? **Hint:** Focus your thinking on ideas about the spread of disease, understanding of cures, and the impact of disease.



Source 1: This image is from the late 14th century. It shows the clothes of Black Death victims being burnt in medieval Europe, circa 1348.